



GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING NATIONAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE (NRI) PROPOSALS

Program Information: Learn more about available or anticipated CSREES competitive grant programs at www.csrees.usda.gov. Select "Funding Opportunities" to find links to full announcements of various programs, including the current NRI Request for Applications.

Conflict of Interest: Please do not review this proposal if you have an institutional or consulting affiliation with the submitting institution, applicants or collaborators, or will gain some benefit from the funding of the project, financial or otherwise. Please do not review this proposal if applicants or collaborators were your thesis or postdoctoral advisee/advisor. Also, please do not review this proposal if, during the **past four years**, you have collaborated on a research project or been a co-author with the submitting applicants and collaborators. If there is a relationship about which you are uncertain, please contact this office for advice on your decision.

Confidentiality: The Department of Agriculture receives research proposals in confidence and is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of their submission and contents. For this reason, confidentiality must be maintained-- **therefore please DO NOT copy, quote, or otherwise use material from this proposal.** If you believe that a colleague can make a substantial contribution to the review, consult with us before disclosing either the contents of the proposal or the applicant's name. When you complete the review, please destroy the proposal and maintain its confidentiality. **If you are unable to review, please contact the respective Program Director, destroy the proposal and maintain its confidentiality.**

Proposal Page Limit: The Project Description section for **Integrated and Standard Research Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships, New Investigator Awards, and Conference Grants** may not exceed 18 single- or double-spaced pages of written text including figures and tables. For **Research Career Enhancement Awards (Sabbatical Awards), Equipment Grants, and Seed Grants** the Project Description may not exceed 7 single- or double-spaced pages of written text including figures and tables. Additions to the Project Description (Appendices) are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed research and are strictly limited to a total of two. This total may include reprints and/or preprints. Reviewers are advised that, should these limits be exceeded, only text within the requirements need be read.

Proposal Review Sheet: Please submit your review(s) by fax or e-mail. A proposal review sheet(s) is provided for fax transmissions. If you send your evaluation(s) by e-mail, please indicate the proposal number, applicant's last name, program name, your name, and your rating (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, or Poor). The enclosed sheet(s) can also be downloaded from the web at www.csrees.usda.gov/business/review/adhoc_review.doc.

Your review comments will be a critical component of the panel's evaluation and ranking of this proposal. The panel will consider the details of your comments along with those from other reviews received for this proposal.

Proposal Evaluation Factors

Standard Research Grants, Strengthening Standard Research Project Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships, New Investigator Awards, Integrated Project Grants and Bridge Grants

1. Scientific merit of the application for research, extension and/or education, including:

- Novelty, innovation, uniqueness, and originality;
- Where model systems are used, ability to transfer knowledge gained from these systems to organisms of importance to U.S. agriculture;
- Conceptual adequacy of the research, extension, and education components, as applicable;
- Clarity and delineation of objectives;
- Adequacy of the description of the undertaking and suitability and feasibility of methodology;
- Demonstration of feasibility through preliminary data and/or, for postdoctoral fellowships, publication record of the mentor; and
- Probability of success of project.

2. Qualifications of proposed project personnel and adequacy of facilities, including:

- Qualifications of applicant (individual or team) to conduct the proposed project, including performance record and potential for future accomplishments (for Postdoctoral Fellowship applications, this applies to the mentor as well as to the postdoctoral applicant);
- Demonstrated awareness of previous and alternative approaches to the problem identified in the proposal;
- Institutional experience and competence in subject area; and
- Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation.

3. Planning and administration of the proposed project, including:

- Time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; and
- For multi-institutional and integrated projects, planned administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, collaborative efforts, evaluation and monitoring efforts, and the planned dissemination of information over the duration of the project.

4. Relevance of the proposal to improvements in and sustainability of U.S. agriculture, including:

- Documentation that the research, extension, and/or education activities are directed toward current or likely future issues or priority areas identified in the current NRI Request for Applications.
- For integrated activities, evident linkage of research, extension, and education functions, as appropriate;
- For integrated activities, evidence of involvement of stakeholders and/or communities of interest.

In addition to the application criteria above, applications considered for bridge grant support will also be judged based on the potential that further funding will sustain and enhance important collaborations and activities that might lead to future program success or success in obtaining other grants.

Applications submitted to program area 32.1, **Epidemiological Approaches for Food Safety**, will also be evaluated on how well the Project Description addresses strength of collaboration and strength of coordination and management.

Postdoctoral fellowship applications also will be evaluated on the quality of the training environment, including:

- Documentation that arrangements have been made with an established investigator to serve as mentor;
- Documentation that arrangements have been made for the necessary facilities, space, and materials to conduct the proposed research; and
- Potential for the postdoctoral fellow to initiate an independent research program.

Conference Applications

In evaluating applications for the support of research conferences, the following factors will be considered:

- Relevance of the proposed conference to agriculture in the U.S. and the appropriateness of the conference in fostering scientific exchange;
- Qualifications of organizing committee and appropriateness of invited speakers to the topic areas being covered;
- Uniqueness and timeliness of the conference; and
- Appropriateness of budget request.

Research Career Enhancement Awards, Equipment Grants, and Seed Grants

The following evaluation factors will be used in reviewing applications for **Research Career Enhancement Awards, Equipment Grants, and Seed Grants**:

- The merit of the proposed activities or research equipment as a means of enhancing the research capabilities and competitiveness of the applicant and/or institution;
- The applicant's previous research experience and background;
- The appropriateness of the proposed activities or research equipment for the goals proposed; and
- Relevance of the project to long-range improvements in and sustainability of U.S. agriculture.

